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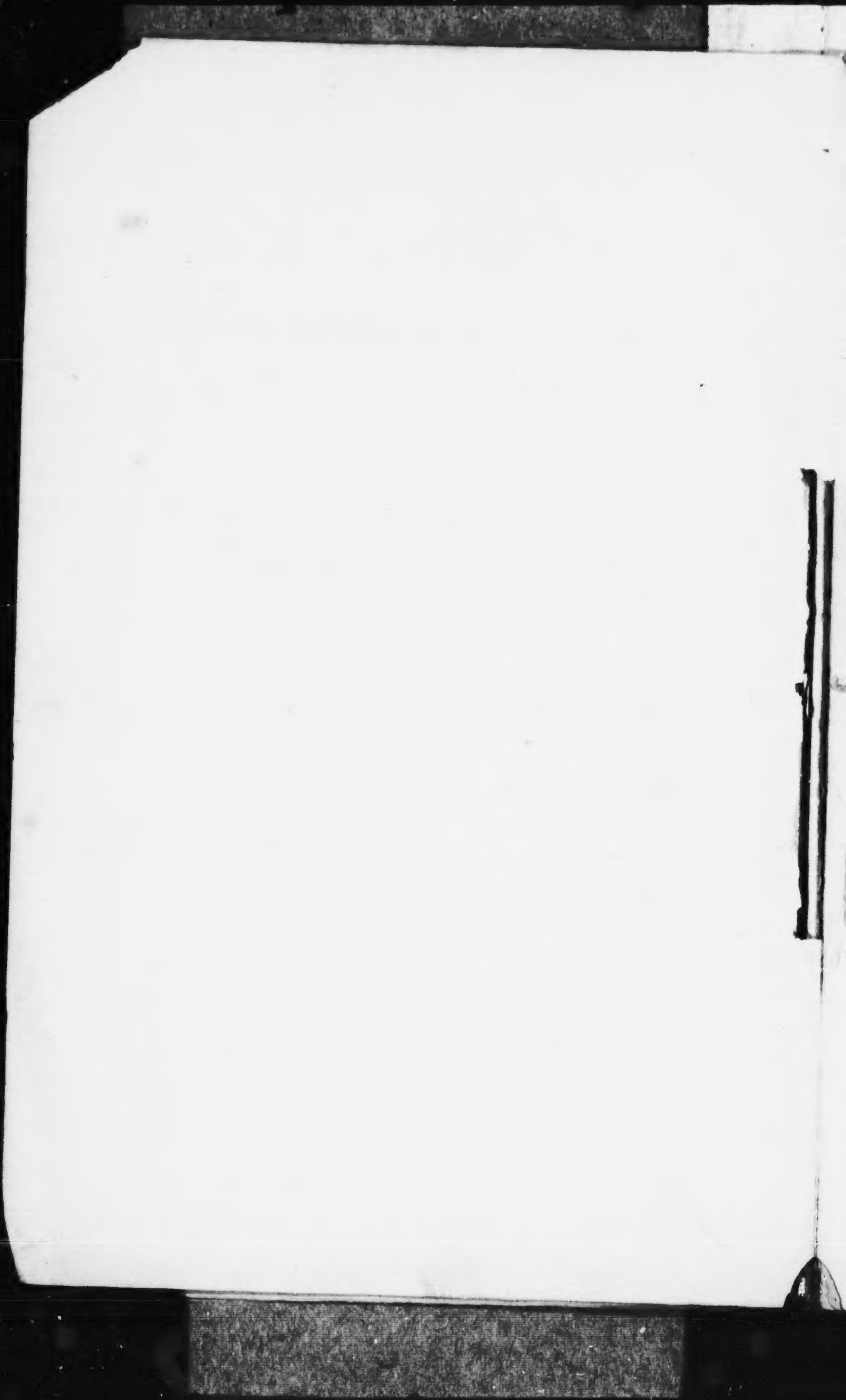
A SERMON
ON THE EXALTED OBJECTS OF THE
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.



A S E R M O N

ON THE

Exalted Objects of the Christian Ministry.



THE
EXALTED OBJECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE CONFERENCE IN KINGSTON, U. C.,
1838, AND AT THE DEDICATION OF THE WESLEYAN
CENTENARY CHAPEL IN ST. JOHNS, N. B., 1839.

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Preached before the Conference in Kingston, U. C. 1838, and at the Dedication of the Wesleyan Centenary Chapel in St. Johns, N. B. 1839.

EPHESIANS iii. 8-10.

8. Ἐμοι, τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων [τῶν] ἁγίων ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὕτη, ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελισάσθαι τὸν ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτον τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

9. Καὶ φωτίσαι πάντας, τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ Θεῷ, τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

10. Ἴνα γνωρισθῇ νυνταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποικίλος σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

"8. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ;

"9. And to make all men see what is the fellowship [dispensation] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ :

"10. To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

The elementary doctrines of Christianity are distinguished by the grandeur of simplicity. Previously to a knowledge of this fact, it would be natural enough to suppose that a system of moral truth emanating immediately from the Supreme Intelligence,—not so much as one of the peculiar principles or data of which the human mind was capable of

anticipating, would, when revealed, be found proportionally difficult of apprehension. But, is this really the case? Is there demanded a high degree of mental cultivation or effort in order to acquire a saving knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus?" Far otherwise. If you aspire to literary eminence among men, a lofty pile extremely difficult of ascent lies before you; and after years of toil occupied in endeavouring to scale it, the funereal plume instead of the garland of genius—a premature grave instead of an immortality of fame, may be the reward of your labours: but if you covet earnestly the honour that cometh from God,—if you are athirst for heavenly wisdom, you may, "from a child, know the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." For though the truths which these Divine Records unfold immeasurably transcend in interest and sublimity the intuitions of genius, the lessons of philosophy, and the discoveries of science; they are, with inimitable wisdom, presented in a form adapted to every variety of human intellect, the most limited as well as the most capacious.

The universal adaptation of the Bible, as well to the intellectual as to the moral condition of our species, is entitled to rank among the most valuable collateral evidences of its Divine origin. It is a signature which the finger of God alone could have stamped upon upon it. This is accomplished by the exhibition of the most essential verities in the shape of attested and authoritative facts. Truths equally elevated and momentous are thus rendered intelligible to the humblest capacity: and while "the wise and the prudent," seduced by the vanity of intellectual pretension, turn away in disgust from "the foolishness of preaching," it becomes, through the energy of the Holy Spirit, the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

Let me not be misunderstood. Far be it from me by this style of remark to concede that the Bible is, in the sense in which the sceptic would employ the term, a *simple* book. Its value as a treasury of various instruction is inappreciable. It has done more than all the other books in the universe to distend the basis and enlarge the volume of the pyramid of human knowledge, while it lifts its summit amid the splendours of the eternal throne. Apart from the supreme object of the Scriptures, their salutary influence upon literature and laws, upon liberty both civil and religious, upon moral science and public sentiment, will be questioned by none whose acquaintance with the light which history reflects upon these topics qualifies him to form an accurate judgment.

But the crowning excellence of the sacred volume is, that it reveals "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It unfolds with progressive clearness that redeeming scheme which occupied the thoughts of God from everlasting—in anticipation of which ETERNAL WISDOM "rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delight was with the sons of men" before the world was. Of this glorious scheme, it is a cheering fact, that "the wayfaring man though a fool" may attain a knowledge sufficient for the purposes of salvation. But we shall fall into a most egregious error if we thence infer, that how divinely soever it is adapted to rescue man from the guilt and the pollutions in which the apostacy has involved him, and to conduct him to the enjoyment of unending bliss, it leaves ungratified and unheeded his aspirations after knowledge; that while it is confessedly an efficient, and indeed the *only* restorative of his moral nature, there is nothing connected with it fitted to invigorate, expand, and enrich his intellectual powers.

How very different was the estimate formed of it by the enlightened apostle of the Gentiles! The treasures of Grecian literature with which his mind was early stored,

and which are to the present moment the admiration of mankind, *he* counted "loss for the EXCELLENCY of the KNOWLEDGE of Christ Jesus his Lord." Prompted by a hallowed emulation to become a proficient in this divine science he *determined to know nothing else*. His ardour in the pursuit, from the moment of his conversion, knew no chill; his efforts no relaxation. He constantly aimed at fresh advances on his previous attainments. And with what success, his writings abundantly illustrate. Those who have studied his epistles with the deepest attention do not hesitate to affirm, that, taken in their *chronological* order, they afford interesting evidence of the progressive expansion of his "knowledge of the mystery of Christ."

And yet, when he is ready to be offered up,—when the time of his departure is at hand; as though he had not passed his spiritual novitiate, he breathes the fervent prayer—"that I may know HIM, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made comformable unto his death."

This, however, will excite no surprise when it is remembered that superior orders of intelligence have been for ages, and still are, occupied in the investigation of the same subject: "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

This most elevated passage strikingly exhibits the *theme*—the *objects*—and the proper *spirit* of the CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

1. Let us attend to the theme of the Christian Ministry : it is *the unsearchable riches of Christ*.

Of all the epistles of St. Paul this to the Ephesians is generally considered by Commentators the loftiest. There is probably no one that reads it, and institutes a comparison between it and the others, who does not receive the same impression. It is characterised, in a very eminent degree, by a holy exaltation of *feeling*, which, in a mind like Paul's, is always associated with a correspondent elevation and enlargement of the *intellectual* faculty. It stands among the Epistolary writings like the narrative of John among the Gospels—imbued with a more than usual measure of the spirit of Him who was “anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows.”

This is accounted for by the occasion and object of its composition. Written under the joyous excitation produced by the intelligence he had received of the faith and love of those of whom he was in a special manner the apostle, its design is not so much to *defend* as to *display* “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” Hence the holy affections of his soul flow forth with unwonted spontaneity and copiousness. Hence he expatiates in an element perfectly congenial with the spirituality and amplitude of his mind. Hence his thoughts are *sentiments* ; and the interior of that heart is disclosed which dictated the noble avowals—“The love of Christ constraineth me.”—“Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

That gospel he emphatically designates in the text “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” This phraseology is among the most marked peculiarities of the apostle's style. It is obviously to be taken in the same sense as the parallel expressions—“the riches of his grace”—“the exceeding riches of his grace,” which occur in the previous chapters.

You cannot, my brethren, but have remarked Paul's predilection for the term *πλοῦτος*, *riches*, as adapted to convey in the most forcible manner the idea of exuberance or profusion, particularly when descanting upon the beneficence of the Deity, or the benefits which flow to us through the mediation of Christ. And how justly are the mercies of the new covenant called "the unsearchable *riches* of Christ!"

Mark their *variety*. Man is a dependent being. He was so before he lost the glory of his primal state. But how has his vain and impious attempt to become independent, multiplied and accumulated his wants! Contrast his present humiliated and wretched condition with the bliss he enjoyed when recent from the hands of his holy and beneficent Creator. Adorned with the Divine image, and admitted to the most intimate communion with his God, the perspective of felicity that then expanded before him was without a shadow and without a limit. But now he is "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him." Now he is an arraigned culprit at the bar of eternal justice. Now his noble powers are desecrated by the "wisdom from beneath, which is earthly, and sensual, and devilish." Now his inheritance on high is forfeited; and he is *without God* in the world. Whither shall he flee? To whom shall he go? "Lord, to whom shall we go? THOU hast the words of eternal life." In the gospel of salvation thou hast opened the profound of thy compassions! thou hast displayed the *riches* of thy redeeming grace! We are blind, and guilty, and polluted, and lost: but thou art made of God unto them that believe, wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

Contemplate their *abundance*. Redeeming grace knows no parsimony. It is as exuberant as it is unmerited. Would that I could *commend* to you, in a manner worthy of the subject, the love of Christ. But though I spake

with the tongue of men and of angels this were impossible ; for it “*passeth knowledge.*” Go to him, ye sons of ignorance ; and he will “*fill* you with the knowledge of his will, in *all* wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Go to him, ye sons of guilt ; for “he will *abundantly* pardon” you. Go to him ye slaves of sin ; and you shall find “*plenteous* redemption.” Let those who feel their misery, of every class, repair to him ; and they will be blessed with “the peace of God which *passeth all understanding,*”—with “joy *unspeakable and full of glory.*” Is this the word of truth ? Are the promises of Him who cannot lie, thus “superlatively great and precious ?” Is such the plenitude of the provisions of grace ?—of the *riches* of Christ ? Who then can repress the burst of praise, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with *ALL* spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

The superabounding grace which thus “reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life” in the experience of those who receive it not in vain, is designed for *all*,—solicits the reception of all at the hands of a beseeching God, and bleeding Saviour. And in entreating sinners to be reconciled to God, the apostles of the Lamb entertained no mental reservation ; they knew nothing of that *ostensible* distinction (without any *real* difference) of a vain philosophy, between *natural* and *moral* ability, by which it has been attempted in modern times to bring together the poles of *free* grace and *limited* salvability—of unfettered *liberty* and inflexible *necessity*. They “warned *every* man, and taught *every* man, in all wisdom, that they might *PRESENT EVERY MAN PERFECT* in Christ Jesus.”

Consider their *inestimable value*. The devious and endless speculations of philosophy concerning the supreme felicity of man are precluded,—the sigh of conscious misery, which the utmost profusion of earthly blessings has never

been found adequate to suppress, "Who will show us any good?" is dissipated forever by the authority and the charm of that voice which declares in the gospel, "I will give you rest." Here are true riches. Here is happiness suited to the nature, commensurate with the faculties, and imperishable as the being of the immortal soul. The whole material universe is represented as valueless in comparison with the worth of one soul by him who made them both. Yet without an interest in CHRIST the soul must be lost; it must pine in spiritual indigence, a disinherited exile from the presence of the LORD and from the glory of his power forever. Oh! how unutterably precious then its redemption. How transcendent and inconceivable the value of the blessings which secure and constitute that redemption! To what shall we resemble the kingdom of heaven? It is "like treasure hid in a field; which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." What cause have the poor to whom such a gospel is preached, to survey the portion of the earthling with an eye of envy or a heart of covetousness? Does his wealth procure him honour? With the riches of CHRIST are connected the faith by which "the elders obtained a good report"—the righteousness which truly makes a man "more excellent than his neighbour"—"the honour that cometh from God." Does it contribute to his protection? The eternal God is the refuge of those who are "rich in faith," and "underneath are his everlasting arms." Does it invest him with power? The moral triumphs of those who are enriched by the grace of life throw into shade all the conquests of an Alexander or a Cæsar; they overcome the principalities and powers of darkness—they rule their own spirit—they have "power with God," and with holy violence take the kingdom of heaven. Are earthly possessions desired because they command so many sources of enjoyment? Infinitely more

enviable are the pleasures that flow from peace with God—from the contemplation of divine truth—from the enrapturing anticipation of a blissful immortality, than from all that can be derived from the gratification of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life. Happy then—supremely happy is the man who findeth the riches of Christ. “For their merchandize is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.” His is “the pearl of great price;” his “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not.”

The intimate and vital relation these blessings sustain to CHRIST is a cardinal point in the Christian system. They are HIS riches. And if the contemplation of their variety, abundance, and intrinsic excellence is so adapted to impress us with their inestimable value, how must our appreciation of them be enhanced, when they are viewed as emanations from him, of whose *fulness*, as the mediator of the New Covenant, “we have all received, and grace for grace.” To apprehend aright the nature and extent of our obligations to him for “the grace that bringeth salvation,” the following considerations must enter essentially into our views of redemption.

The original of all saving truth is in the *person* and *office* of JESUS CHRIST. In him is resident *the fulness of the Godhead*; and he alone is “the (*απαυγασμα*) *effulgence* of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.” If, therefore, “the glory of God” has irradiated our hearts, it has been reflected from “the face of Jesus Christ.” If the eyes of our understanding have been enlightened, to “know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;” it is because we have received “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” Take away Christ; and an immediate, total, and fearfully-ominous eclipse extinguishes the glory that dwells between the cherubim.

The riches of grace have been procured by the sacrificial merit of his death. We are redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver or gold; but with the *precious blood of Christ*. Many theories of salvation have been propounded; many figments of their own invention substituted for the foundation which God himself has laid in Zion, by those who have an invincible objection to being *bought with a price*. But those who *will* not accept of "redemption through the blood" of Christ, *must* take the alternative. In his atonement we see the price, and in that price the value of his riches, as well as the highest reason for their being called his.

And still another is, that spiritual union with CHRIST is inseparable from an interest in those riches. To none but those who *receive HIM* is the privilege imparted of becoming the sons of God. Just in proportion as "we know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings," are we in possession of celestial treasure. Hence believers are said to be made *partakers of Christ*. Hence "all the fulness of God" is represented by the apostle as comprised in his *dwelling in the heart by faith*.

Such, my brethren, is the theme of the Christian Ministry,—a theme whose resources even eternity will not exhaust, but the interest of which will on the contrary increase with the progression of the knowledge and the existence of the redeemed, forever. It opens mines of celestial wealth which Paul, who had been rapt into the third heavens, and on whose expansive intellect the revealing Spirit shone in full illumination, after endeavouring in vain to explore, pronounces ἀνεξιχνίαστον *unsearchable*. The etymological import of the term is—*whose footsteps it is impossible to trace*. And unless you can by searching find out God, unless you can find out the Almighty to perfection, you cannot comprehend the wisdom, the power, the grace, the glory, involved in *the riches of Christ*.

There is a certain class of religionists who seem sensitively afraid lest men should think too highly of JESUS CHRIST; and when they discover in any part of Scripture a passage, or even a phrase, which, by an artful perversion of its true design, enables them the more speciously to dilute and reduce the meaning of such expressions as this in the text, they rejoice as one that findeth great spoil. Such persons may talk with an eloquence as bland as that of Ulysses in Homer—of the union of moral beauty and grandeur in the character of Jesus—of his example at once so pure and so persuasive—of the relations so tender and so important which he sustains to the world; but while they deny his *essential Deity*, he is insulted rather than honoured by their most splendid compliments: by such expedients they may impose upon “*children*, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,” but they are not very likely to succeed in deceiving the *elect*. The true reason why the riches of CHRIST are, and will ever remain inconceivable in all their amplitude by *finite* understandings, is, that they are the riches of THE INFINITE. Who can comprehend the glory of the redeeming acts which the Great Head of the Church has already performed! And yet we “which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption—the redemption of the body.” Though heirs of God we have not yet come to years of majority. Oh! the untold—the *unimagined* glories within the veil! There we shall behold the throne of God and the Lamb, and drink of the vital river which, clear as crystal, issues thence! There the petition of Moses,—the supreme desire of every believing soul, “I beseech thee shew me thy glory!” will be answered by Divine manifestations which mortal humanity could not for a moment have sustained—manifestations which will increase in richness, in refulgence, and in assimilating efficacy, through the ages of immortality!

II. Having thus exhibited the theme, I now proceed to illustrate the *objects of the Christian Ministry*.

They are thus described by the apostle: "To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." From which declaration we learn, that while the *immediate* object of the evangelic ministry is the spiritual illumination of mankind; in its *ulterior* bearings it embraces "the principalities and powers in heavenly places"—all the various orders of God's holy intellectual creation.

The immediate aspect of the Gospel revelation is, of course, upon MAN for whom principally it was made—for whom the Son of God was invested with his redeeming office—for whom he left the bosom of the Father and expired in atoning agony upon the cross—for whom he is now on the right hand of power, and ever liveth to make intercession. To turn *men* from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, was therefore the primary object of the mission and ministry of the apostle, as it is also of ours. And this momentous object is only to be accomplished by enlightening them to perceive the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.

The sense to be attached to the term, *mystery*, in this place, is sufficiently apparent from the explicative clause which immediately follows it. It simply imports something *secret*, or *undeveloped*. The apostle refers, as is obvious from the context, to the Divine purpose relative to the admission of the Gentiles to an equal participation of spiritual privileges with the Jews, under the Christian dispensation; and he calls that purpose a *mystery*, because, depending as it did upon the sovereign pleasure of the Deity, it was

impervious to the research of human reason, and had hitherto remained shaded in obscurity. Previously to its being brought to light by the gospel, it was *HID* in God. But, it may be asked—Was this important part of the redeeming plan concealed; was the voice of inspiration entirely silent as to the purpose of God to call the Gentiles into his church, until the period arrived for its *practical* manifestation? Is it not plainly involved in the magnificent promise made to Abraham, that in his seed *all the nations* of the earth should be blessed? Did not the evangelical prophet with characteristic clearness declare, “It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved Israel: I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the end of the earth?” And was it not a prominent object of the apostle in reasoning with the christians of Rome, to evince that the accession of the Gentiles to the fold of the Redeemer was perfectly in accordance with the anticipations of prophecy? All this is readily admitted. Yet—if the light emitted by the prophetic oracle on this subject shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not; if “they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, (*ἐξέστησαν*, literally, *were in an ecstasy*) because that on the *Gentiles* also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost;” if an *immediate* revelation was necessary to make known to Paul himself—deeply versant though he was in the writings of the prophets—“the *mystery*, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel;” then may it with truth be affirmed—that, till the day spring from on high hath visited us, this benignant purpose of the Deity was virtually *concealed* within his own bosom,—that, to adopt the apostle’s words in the previous part of this chapter, it “was not made known unto the sons of men *as*” (in a manner so perspicuous and specific) “it is *now* revealed

unto his holy apostles and" evangelic "prophets by the Spirit." It was obviously demanded by the destination of St. Paul as "the apostle of the Gentiles," that, on a subject so intimately connected with the efficient discharge of his *peculiar* functions he should be favoured with the clearest revelations: and in reference to his efforts universally to diffuse the illumination thus shed upon his own mind, and to vindicate the Divine procedure in "visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name," he could say, with the confidence of truth, "Inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I MAGNIFY mine office."

Though it be seldom admissable to introduce into the pulpit questions which appropriately belong to the department of biblical criticism, the proper elucidation of this branch of our subject seems here to call for a moment's deviation from the ordinary course. Instead of *κοινωνία*, *fellowship*, a large proportion of the best ancient Manuscripts, Versions and Printed Editions of the New Testament, as well as the Greek Fathers, have *οικονομία*, the DISPENSATION or ECONOMY, "of the mystery." To the adoption of this reading there is hardly a dissentient voice among the learned. Macknight indeed maintains the genuineness of the former; but is evidently influenced in his preference by the imagined sanction it affords to his favourite but fanciful theory of interpretation wherever the term *mystery* occurs in this epistle—that the apostle employs it in allusion to the *Pagan mysteries*. That which we have suggested, however, besides being supported by all but unexceptionable documentary evidence, accords much better, as will be perceived on examination, with the scope of the entire passage. In the preceding part of the chapter the apostle speaks of "the *dispensation* of the grace of God" which was given to him, and immediately explains what he meant by calling it "the *mystery of Christ*." There is an allusion in the original word rendered *dispen-*

sation, to domestic economy, or the plan adopted in the management of the affairs of a family. The church is the house, or family, of GOD; and the Divine administration of its affairs has assumed various forms in different ages of the world. The *Mosaic* dispensation differed from the *Patriarchal*; and the glory of the *Gospel* economy surpasses them both. And what gives it this pre-eminence? The text furnishes the reply. By proclaiming the *unsearchable riches* of CHRIST it unveils to an admiring world the dispensation of the mystery which was hid from ages and generations—it clearly exhibits that undistinguishing grace of GOD by which CHRIST “tasted death for EVERY MAN”—it throws open the gates of Zion for the admission of ALL, Gentiles as well as Jews, who seek a sanctuary from wrath and sin under the covering of the DIVINE AND UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT. This is the dispensation of the mystery with the glory of which the great apostle was specially designated by the ascended Redeemer to irradiate the whole earth.

Respecting GOD, in whose mind this mystery so long lay concealed, it is significantly added—“who created all things by Jesus Christ.” The declaration in the epistle to the Hebrews—“by whom also he made the worlds”—is strictly parallel. In both instances, *δια*, *by*, designates, not the *instrumental*, but the *principal* or *efficient cause* of the creation, a use of that preposition alike in accordance with classical and sacred usage. Here, indeed, the idea of instrumentality or subordinate agency is palpably absurd because necessarily precluded by the exigency of the case. To create is the *inalienable* prerogative of the ALMIGHTY. No finite being could give existence to the minutest atom, or in the slightest degree *contribute* to its production. He who *created* all things must have been *before* all things, and unquestionably possesses the *incommunicable* attributes of SUPREME DIVINITY. Some, instead of *by*, propose to render, *for*, or, *on whose account*, which would designate

CHRIST as the *final cause* of the creation. Without pretending to determine which of these interpretations is here *philologically* correct, we know on the highest authority that, *doctrinally*, both are true. "For BY him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and FOR him." It would seem to have been the apostle's design by the clause under consideration to intimate that the *motive* by which the Deity was actuated in creating the world is to be sought in *redemption*,—that when he was rearing the stupendous fabric of the universe, he was, in fact, erecting a theatre for a sublimer and more complete exhibition of His character than all its stars, and suns, and systems are fitted to display.

Need I remind you, my brethren, that the efforts of St. Paul, to make all men acquainted with the dispensation of the mystery with which he was charged, and of the dignity and importance of which he entertained such exalted conceptions, were directed to lead them to not merely an intellectual, but to an *experimental, transforming and practical* knowledge of the saving plan. What, in his estimation, was emphatically *the RICHES of the glory of this mystery*? Let himself answer: "Christ IN you the hope of glory, whom we preach."

But though this is the primary object of the Christian Ministry, which is thence appropriately termed "the ministry of *reconciliation*," its design does not terminate here. It takes a wider, loftier range. Whilst it is the grand means instituted and most signally owned of God for bringing back to his family the self-exiled children of the fall, it is at the same time fraught with intellectual interest and practical utility to those elder members of his household who have never thrown off their allegiance to his authority. Angels were among the auditors of Paul; and, though proverbial

for their wisdom, were not ashamed to take a lesson on redemption from his lips; they undervalued not the treasure because, instead of being themselves entrusted with its distribution, it was deposited in earthen vessels, mean and fragile: "To the intent that now unto the *principalities* and *powers* in *heavenly places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." By this designation the idiom of the New Testament admits of our understanding no other class of beings than those to whom it *obviously* applies,—all the different ranks of spiritual existence that occupy the heavenly mansions. Nor is this the only portion of Scripture in which they are portrayed to us as contemplating with the liveliest emotions of interest the work of human salvation. When God was manifest in the flesh, with feelings of admiration which beings who had witnessed and celebrated his pre-existent glory alone could experience, he was **SEEN OF ANGELS**. The apostle Peter when advertising to the diligence with which the ancient prophets applied their minds to obtain a clear perception of the blessings of the evangelic covenant, and to ascertain with precision the time of its introduction, withdraws the veil from the celestial world, and exhibits its inhabitants as similarly engaged. "Which things" says he, "the angels desire to look into," *εἰς ἃ επιθυμοῦσιν ἄγγελοι παρασπουδᾶν*; literally, *towards which things the angels vehemently desire to bend*; a most expressive mode of denoting their intense solicitude minutely to examine, to pry into, the mysteries of redeeming grace. This graphic delineation of the interesting fact was doubtless suggested by its association in the mind of the sacred writer with the emblematical scene in the temple which embodied the same lesson. In the holy of holies, that type of "the true sanctuary which the Lord hath pitched and not man," there were to be seen *the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat*. The mercy-seat, enclosing the book of the law and sprinkled with sacrificial blood, adumbrated the

true propitiatory which under a higher and more spiritual economy "God hath set forth to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past:" and the resplendent cherubim bending over it in a posture of absorbed contemplation, could not fail to elevate the mind of the devout Jew from the type to the reality; it would teach him that the scheme of atoning mediation by which he had access unto God challenges the investigation and delighted attention of the whole celestial throng.

On what principle, it is natural to enquire, does the work of redemption exert so commanding an influence over minds of the highest order? Whence arises the entrancing interest with which they survey the sufferings of CHRIST and the glory that follows? Let the question be reverently proposed; let it emanate, not from a vain and carnal curiosity, but from a hallowed desire to acquire more fully the "riches of spiritual understanding;" and the divine ORACLE instead of rebuking will encourage; instead of silencing will gratify the inquiry. By it we are taught that from the beginning there has subsisted the most intimate official relation between angels in heaven and the church on earth; for, "are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" that when God ushered his 'first begotten' into the world, all the angels were commanded to worship him; that CHRIST is constituted head over all things for the benefit of his church, and exercises his supremacy over *thrones, dominions, principalities* and *powers* in reference to her government and interests; and that the grand and ultimate object of redemption is the association under him, as their common head, of angels and men, whom sin had so long dissevered, in one rejoicing family forever.

But the fact announced in the text,—that the most illustrious orders of the celestial hierarchy are indebted to the evolution of the plan of redeeming mercy for their

profoundest views of the glory of God, would alone adequately account for all the research which they expend upon it. Here especially it is that they see displayed, ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία, *the amazingly diversified and manifold wisdom of God*. Amid ranges of contemplation that lie immeasurably beyond the sphere of human vision, to which the genius of Newton never soared, they are familiar with illustrations, in endless diversity and astonishing magnificence, of the divine perfections: but even the brightest of those illustrations fades before the surpassing glory of redemption; the wisdom that shines in them all is not so immense, so multiform, so instructive, as that which is exemplified in the formation and gradual developement of the mediatorial scheme. But why is the WISDOM of GOD particularly named as the object of the highest admiration of the principalities and powers in heavenly places? Why not his LOVE? his POWER? his JUSTICE? Plainly because *wisdom* is that property of the Divine Being by which all his operations are directed; in accordance with the dictates of which all the manifestations of his glory, whether in creation, providence, or redemption, are exhibited. Of the essential *rectitude* of GOD angels could entertain no doubt; and they were equally persuaded that his *benevolence* is infinite, and that the thunder of his *power* none can understand. But they knew, also, that those attributes could not be displayed in our redemption until infinite WISDOM had previously solved the great moral problem, "How shall man be just with God?" And with whatever rapture they listened to the first annunciation of the expedient by which this was to be accomplished, it is obvious that they did not clearly apprehend the redeeming counsels of the TRIUNE GOD, until the obscurities of previous and preparatory dispensations were dispelled by the effulgence of the Gospel. In the quaint but striking language of an old divine, "This doctrine of the Gospel he kept close and hid in his own

breast; not a creature knew it; no, not the angels who were his nearest courtiers and dearest favourites; it lay *hid in God* even from them. A mystery which, when it should be revealed, should amaze the world, put angels to school again, as if they had known nothing in comparison of this, wherein they should know over again all those glorious riches which are in God, and that more perfectly and fully than ever yet. And so after they had a little studied the catechism and compendium, then should come out a large volume, a new system of the riches of the glory of God, *the mystery of Christ*, which is the last edition also, now enlarged, perfected, wherein the large inventory of God's glorious perfections is more fully set down with additions."

We shall better appreciate the practical moment of redemption to the angelic orders, if we remember that whatever increases their knowledge of the character of God, increases in the same proportion their ineffable complacency in that character, and by consequence their holiness and happiness. All *their* mental acquisitions are tributary to their moral excellence and felicity. Knowledge, the knowledge of Him who is the fountain and archetype of truth, is the object of their pauseless pursuit, with a view not merely to gratify the desire of knowing inseparable from an intellectual nature, but that it may increase their conformity to him, and render them susceptible of still richer communications from him, in limitless progression. To these holy purposes every fresh accession to their previous resources is appropriated as soon as acquired. Who, if those things are so, can calculate the amount of benefit they thus derive, and shall eternally derive from the contemplation of the glory of God in the face of JESUS CHRIST; from the unwearied prosecution of their researches into the diversified, fathomless wisdom of God as exemplified in his dealings towards his church! On "the *principalities*

and powers in heavenly places" then, as well as upon the destinies of the human race, the theme of the Christian Ministry has a most momentous bearing; to them, as well as to the redeemed, the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be an object of rapture forever; and, mingling with the song of those who have washed their robes and made them white in his blood, and vieing with its loudest melody, will there be heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and honour, and glory, and blessing!"

III. The third topic that demands our attention is the spirit which characterised the apostle, and which should characterise all who sustain the sacred office: *Unto me, who am LESS THAN THE LEAST of all saints, is this grace given.*

On this part of the subject, however, our remarks will be brief. Whoever forms a just estimate of "the work of an evangelist," must at once perceive the indispensable necessity of personal religion—of an experimental knowledge of God our Saviour, to him who would discharge with fidelity, or even rightly appreciate, its momentous responsibilities. When the distinguishing grace of God selected St. Paul "to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel," he qualified him to negotiate the embassy by revealing his Son in Him. Without this spiritual manifestation from on high, the most powerful intellect cannot pierce the haze which, to an unrenewed mind, surrounds the mystery of Christ; and the highest endowments of eloquence are but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. There is a potency, or rather an omnipotency in this interior manifestation of the Son of God which transforms whom it touches; it is that unction from the Holy One without which no man can himself

understand, much less teach others, *the deep things of God*. Thence spring faith, meekness, purity, fortitude, glowing love and burning zeal, with the most effectual guard, support and ornament of all the associate graces of the Spirit—**HUMILITY**. What a hallowed and adorning lustre did this quality shed over all the other noble attributes of Paul's character! On one occasion we hear him say, "I am the *least* of the Apostles, who am not *meet* to be called an *Apostle*, because I persecuted the church of God." But when in the contemplation of *the unsearchable riches of CHRIST*, his soul kindles into rapture, even *that* humiliating form of expression does not satisfy. He looks round for one still more emphatic; and finding none adequate to convey the self-annihilating sense of unworthiness which, in view of the dignity of his mission, prostrates him in the very dust, he coins one for his purpose. The *superlative* degree of comparison sinks into the *positive*; and forming a comparative upon it, he exclaims, *ἐμοὶ το ἐλαχίστοτέρῳ*, "Unto me, who am *LESS* than the *least* of all saints, is this grace given." We are here reminded of what is related of one who imbibed a large measure of the spirit of the apostle—the celebrated *Austin of Hippo*. Being on one occasion asked what was the *first* part of religion, he answered, **HUMILITY**; when asked what was the *second*, he again said, **HUMILITY**; and what the *third*, his unvarying reply was, **HUMILITY**, alluding to the memorable answer of Demosthenes to the question, What is eloquence? Pride, unseemly in any one who names the name of **CHRIST**, is peculiarly inconsistent and detestable in him whose business it is to teach the doctrines, and enforce an imitation of the example of that Saviour who was *meek and lowly in heart*.

From the illustration of this subject we derive two inferences:

1. *It evinces the indefinite improveability of mind.* Improveability, I mean, not in intellectual power and

resources merely, but in every attribute and acquisition that can enrich, and adorn, and beatify an immortal spirit. Who shall assign limits, in any of these respects, to its sublime career? Who imagine the dimensions, beyond which it will be incapable of further expansion—when its research will have exhausted the wonders of creation, providence, and redemption—when its compass will sweep the circumference of the DIVINITY? Subjects these, on which *angels* have, from time immemorial, been exercising their mighty faculties; but have they yet touched, or even in the distance *descried* the goal? Have *they* discovered soundings in *the depth of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God*? No: with undiminished, with increasing astonishment, they cry one to another, “How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” And is this the destiny, too, of the believer in Christ? Inspiring thought! Infinity will be the range, and eternity the period of our progress in knowledge, in holiness, and in happiness. If a *perpetuity* of bliss is bliss, what shall be said of its perpetual *augmentation*! Never will the enraptured words of John be inapplicable to our circumstances, *It doth not yet appear what we shall be!*

2. *It attaches the highest conceivable dignity and importance to the MINISTERIAL OFFICE.* Well may it be represented as a matter of admiration that a treasure, than which there lies not one undiscovered in the fields of heaven more valuable, should be deposited in *earthen vessels*,—that an office which would have been considered promotion by an archangel, should be conferred upon a sinful child of the dust! Contemplate this office in whatever aspect you may, its transcendant dignity and importance are conspicuous. It is the only one on earth, to which men are called by the inward voice of the Holy Ghost; and which has a direct and immediate bearing upon eternity. It is therefore as much superior to all others as the interests of the soul are

to those of the body—heaven to earth—or immortality to a moment. Whenever I pass the threshold of the sanctuary, I feel that I stand on sacred ground; there “awful voices” are heard, and “holy inspirations” breathe; before me stands a man of like passions with myself,—but though no halo of celestial radiance encircle his brow, nor demonstrations of omnipotence attest his mission, not the less do I recognize in him a minister from no earthly court—a commissioned *ambassador of Christ!*

“There stands
The legate of the skies! His theme divine,
His office sacred, his credentials clear.
By him the violated law speaks out
Its thunders; and by him, in strains as sweet
As angels use, the Gospel whispers peace.”

Oh, what must be the moral grandeur of his theme; what the importance of the destiny that hangs on the reception of his message, since the one challenges and rewards the profoundest investigation, while the other wakes the deepest sympathies of “the principalities and powers in heavenly places!”

Men and brethren! I have but a single question to propose in conclusion; and if, while *the unsearchable riches of Christ* have been displayed, you have not listened with the ear of the sceptical or the careless, I unsolicitously commit its solution and its practical operation to your own hearts and consciences—**HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT SALVATION?**

THE END.

